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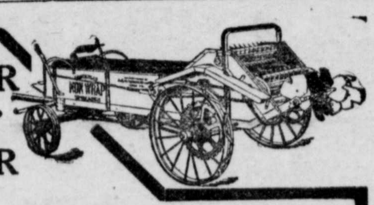

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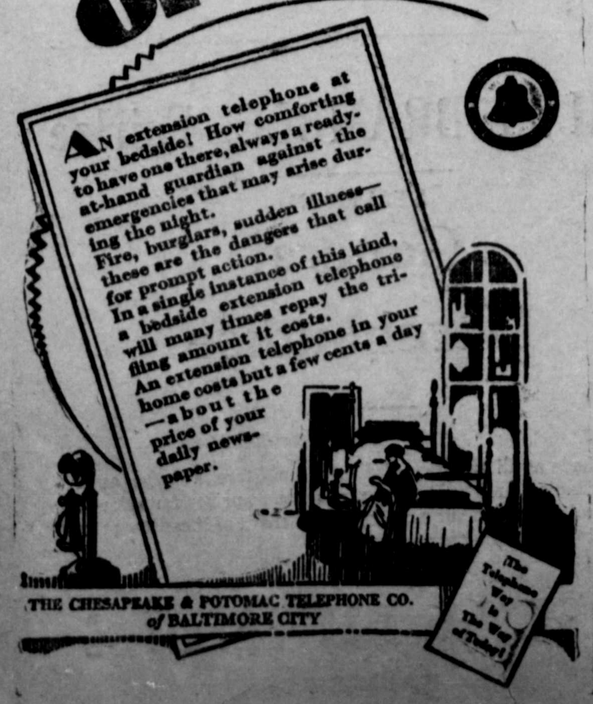

THE CHESAPEAKE & POTOMAC TELEPHONE CO. of BALTIMORE CITY

EACH HAD A SECRET FROM THE OTHER

(© by D. J. Walsh.)

SUSANNE TAFT was eating toast and drinking cocoa alone at one end of the big table in the high, cheerless and rather chill dining room of her house on Cedar street. She had a blue wool scarf about her full shoulders and the hand that held the thin Haviland cup to her lips was cold. Winter was setting in with a vengeance and the new furnace boy did not understand keeping a fire. She thought drearily that she was going to miss Mr. Pease a good deal. After many years of faithful service to the residents of Cedar street he had died suddenly a few days before.

There was another thing that made Susanne sad that morning. She had heard just last night that the old Boyd house next door was sold. It had been in the hands of the agent for a long time, but being a large and expensive place to keep up, nobody had seemed to care for it. A stranger had bought it. A stranger in the old Boyd house! It meant to Susanne the utter passing of many things she had loved and valued in her life.

She was a woman of forty-six, amply proportioned, with a clear skin, soft blue eyes and a great quantity of smooth, lightly graying hair. Not beautiful, but sweet and good and gentle, the kind of woman who makes men and little children happy. But she was an old maid. The man she had loved all her life had not wanted her and the other men she would not have. Therefore she had arrived at a time when she was alone in her house where there had once been the joyous bustle of many goings and comings. Her sisters had married and gone forth into lives of their own; yesterday Jane, the youngest, had written from France. Her oldest brother was in South America. In like manner everybody she seemed to have known or cared about in her youth had drifted away, leaving her a bit of flotsam to float alone on the current of time.

It came to her as she put down her cocoa untasted that it was folly for her to keep on living alone in this way, maintaining a house that was altogether beyond her needs and her income. Much better for her to do as her sister Helen wanted, sell the place to Mr. Gifford, store such furniture as she had an emotional fondness for, auction off the rest and with the proceeds see a bit of the world, accomplish a new system of living. "You are wasting your powers of mind and body there in dull old Westmore," Helen had written. Perhaps it was true. And in any event she no longer had an excuse for keeping the old house on their account; they never visited it any more. If she wanted to see them she must go where they were.

She arose from the table and going to the window looked at the old house next door. When John Boyd went away for the last time, he had given her one of the keys to the side door. "You might want to go in there for something, sometime," he had told her. "You are welcome to books or anything else you may want." John Boyd was the last Boyd of all and the house was his. He had left it just as it stood except for a few gifts to his parents' friends. And he had sold it just as it stood, furniture, hangings, china and all. The contents were old-fashioned and not very valuable, for nothing new had been brought during his mother's latter years. Yet to Susanne it was filled with the most precious furnishings of all—memories of John's youth and of her own. She wished to bid farewell to them while there was yet time.

She took the key from the sideboard drawer, where it had been undisturbed since John gave it to her almost five years ago and leaving her breakfast unfinished, she put on her fur coat and her hat and went out of her house, round by the walk to the side door of the Boyd dwelling. A storm of sleet last night had made footing treacherous, but there was no snow. The lock yielded easily to her key and she entered into the sitting room, which had been the scene of so many happy gatherings.

It was not this room or the dining room beyond or the great double parlors she wished to see, but a little room on the other side of the house which the Boyd boys, John and Ernest, had called their den. Ernest was dead now and nobody knew where John was except that he was a wanderer on the face of the earth. She hesitated before the door of this little room, then opened it, and, trembling with emotion, looked within.

A faint smell of tobacco smote her in the face. The shades were down, but she could see even in the dimness that somebody had sat in that deep chair before the fireplace where a fire had certainly been lit. Upon the table stood an old-fashioned kerosene lamp by which somebody had been reading. A book lay face downward beside the lamp. She lifted it and her glance fell upon a well remembered page in "Aucassin and Nicolette." She had given John that book on his birthday long ago. It was as if he had spoken to her. It was as if he were there in that little memory-sacred room with her. She put away the possibility that the agent had probably brought there the purchaser a night or two before and that they had lit the fire and hunted up the lamp and sat there discussing the whys and wherefores of their bargain. Was not the little volume proof enough of John's presence?

She pressed her lips to the page and then sinking slowly into the deep chair she laid her face on its arm and wept, she who had believed all her tears were shed. The loneliness, the futility of her life and love passed over her in a devastating flood and she wondered if she could go into a future that seemed to promise no more than the past had given.

Presently she lifted her face, dried her eyes and, taking the little book, went out, closing the doors softly behind her one after the other until she came to the outer door, which she locked. In a moment she was at home. The fire was making itself felt, her canary wanted his breakfast, her flowers needed watering. There was a meeting of the woman's club that afternoon, at which she was scheduled to speak, and a sewing bee for the hospital that evening. The telephone bell was ringing. It was Mrs. Millard asking her to entertain the Ladies' Aid the following day. "You are the only one of us all who has room enough."

It came to her that too many threads were attached to her; she could not break them all without vital agony to herself.

"No, I guess I'll stay right here. I'm needed. Maybe nowhere else could I be as useful," she thought.

At that moment somebody knocked at the side door. Without ceasing to pour water on her primroses she called "Come in!" Then as hesitation rather than neighborliness seemed to follow upon her words, she called "Do come in. I'm busy." The steps she heard were not old Mrs. Beecher's, as she expected. She looked over her shoulder and saw a man standing upon the threshold of the room.

Afterward she regretted the breakage of the old majolica pitcher, but then she could only realize dizzily that John Boyd stood before her. She shook hands with him, she gave him a chair, she excused the broken pitcher. "It's nothing, really." Then she sat down to visit with him.

"I came last night and spent the evening in the den. In fact, I fell asleep and did not awaken until daylight. Then I went down to the hotel, where I had intended to stay, bathed and breakfasted and hurried back up here to see you." He smiled, winning a smile from her in return. Few women are ever so happy as to see their boyish sweethearts in the men who return after many years, but Susanne saw that John Boyd had scarcely changed.

"I've come back to stay," he answered quietly.

"Why, what—what put that in your head?" she asked.

"You. From a darkened room I watched you last night, sitting here in this lighted one, sewing, the same Susanne that I realized suddenly I cannot live without."

"But I am a left-over, John."

"So am I." He came and stood beside her, looking down into her face. "I've nobody but you. I want you very much, Susanne."

She didn't tell him that she had always wanted him. She didn't tell him that she had been in the room so full of memory and his presence and that as long as she lived the little volume of "Aucassin and Nicolette" should be her dearest treasure. And he didn't tell her that upon returning to the room he had smelled the familiar perfume she always wore and had found in the chair a small tear-wet handkerchief embroidered with her name. Thus each had a secret from the other, but they were secrets that made for happiness. Meanwhile they had plans to make for a long and blissful future.

Old Romans Wrestled With Traffic Problem

Rome was the Detroit of ancient times. Roman mechanics and coach makers developed chariot making to an art, discovered the advantages of quantity if not mass production, and popularized the delights of surveying a world from above swiftly turning wheels.

With many paved highways tending out of the city, Roman chariot makers were pressed to meet the demand for their vehicles, and these soon became so numerous on the narrow streets that Caesar in 195 introduced a "taxi ordinance" prohibiting chariots for hire from operating in the city. His chief motive, however, is said to have been his desire to reserve the chariot for imperial processions. Thousands of nobles and tradesmen were owners of chariots and these, too, Caesar banished for awhile but such was the increase of employment, industries and communications that the decree soon was shelved. A postal service was established and Augustus authorized the use of chariots in carrying the mails.

Some of the vehicles had four wheels and covered tops similar to the recent coaches but most of them were two-wheeled like those used for racing. The most elaborate were inlaid with precious metals and gems. Having no springs, the pleasure chariot was elaborately fitted with soft cushions. When Nero went on a journey sometimes as many as 3,000 such vehicles made up his caravan.—Detroit News.

Cat Collects Traps

The inhabitants of Harrow, England, were mystified. They had been persevering in setting traps for the rats that had been frequenting their gardens, and every morning not only were there no rats—but also no traps!

A thorough search was made, and at last they ran to earth a large half-wild cat, whose lair was under a shed in the neighborhood. Investigation of this lair brought to light 14 traps snugly stored—but, needless to say, they were minus the rats!

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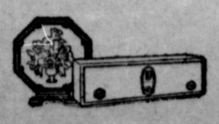

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